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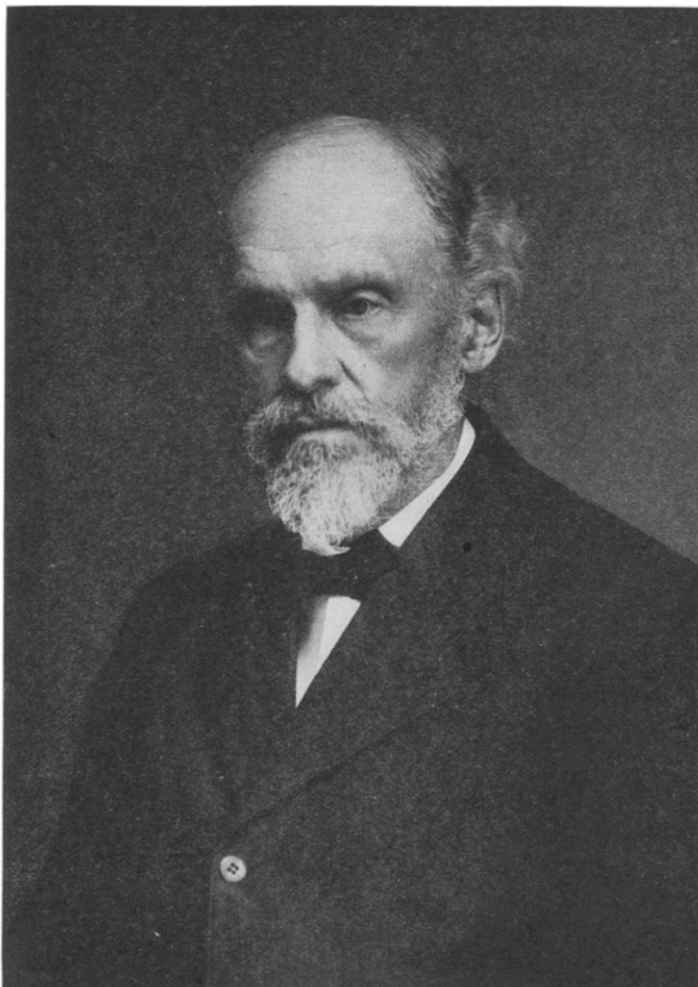
Work and Workers

WILLIAM NEWTON CLARKE

American theological scholarship has suffered an unusual loss in the death of Professor William Newton Clarke, which occurred on January 14, 1912. For the past dozen years his writings have probably been more widely influential than those of any other distinctively theological scholar in our country. His sincere and profound religious faith lent a reassuring tone to his messages while he was facing and voicing the perplexities of the present transition period in religious thinking. Because of this unfailing spiritual emphasis, he was able to lead men gradually and tactfully, without unnecessary alarm or sensation, into sympathy with the scientific spirit in theological scholarship. Hundreds of pastors and teachers owe to him a debt of gratitude for having revealed the possibility of a theology which should preserve the evangelical emphasis together with an open-minded search for the truth. Through his leadership men have been able to advance in their understanding of religion by the inspiring pathway of evolution instead of by the painful crisis of revolution.

Professor Clarke in 1909, under the title, *Sixty Years with the Bible*, published a delightful narrative of his personal growth in theological thought. Beginning with the usual belief in the infallibility of the Scriptures, he was led by the honesty and thoroughness of his study to discover that the real meaning of the Bible cannot be ascertained unless the student brings to his task such equipment that exegesis becomes a creative activity, and not a mere reproduction of scriptural ideas. The difference between the conception of biblical interpretation with which he began and the ideal to which his scholarship led him has been admirably expressed by him in the following words: "At first I said 'The Scriptures limit me to this'; later I said, 'The Scriptures open my way to this.' At first I was regarding the restraints of the Bible; afterward I was following out its spirit."

But deeply as Dr. Clarke was interested in biblical scholarship, his great influence lay in the realm of theological thinking. His only exegetical work is a commentary on Mark, written in the eighties, before the problems of historical criticism were acutely felt. The book which first



THE LATE PROFESSOR WILLIAM NEWTON CLARKE

commanded wide attention was his *Outlines of Christian Theology*, which grew out of his work as a teacher of theology, and which, after first being privately printed, was revised and published in 1898. With the exception of a pioneer attempt by Professor Lewis F. Stearns in 1893, this was the first treatise on systematic theology in this country which frankly abandoned the traditional ideal and optimistically proposed to set forth religious beliefs as the product of religious experience rather than as externally revealed truths which we must appropriate on the basis of authority. "Religion," said Dr. Clarke, "is the reality of which theology is the study." "Where shall Christian theology find its materials? Anywhere. It should learn from any teacher that can teach it, and receive light from any source."

In this spirit, he published in 1899 *What Shall We Think of Christianity?* a series of lectures delivered at Johns Hopkins University, in which the living experience underlying doctrines and institutions was lucidly set forth. *Can I Believe in God the Father?* published in 1899, contains the lectures delivered at the Harvard Summer School of Theology in that year. *A Study of Christian Missions* (1900) is one of the most discriminating expositions ever published of the spirit of efficient missionary enterprise. The Nathaniel William Taylor lectures at Yale in 1905 on *The Use of the Scriptures in Theology* embody an attempt to state frankly the outcome for theology of an untrammelled adoption of the critical-historical method of studying the Bible. In 1909 appeared his contribution to the International Theological Library, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, and his *Sixty Years with the Bible*. His latest work, appearing only a few months before his death, is an attempt to define the essence of Christianity in terms of *The Ideal of Jesus*.

All of these works are marked by lucidity of style, freedom from polemic, absolute candor, reverent appreciation of traditional views, and equally reverent regard for the needs and ideals of the present age. They admirably reveal the rich spiritual experience of the man who constantly grows in mind and broadens in sympathy. For a long time to come they will serve to steady and to reassure those who are making the perilous transition from a religion of authority to the religion of the Spirit.

It involves no disparagement of this great service rendered by Dr. Clarke if we recognize that his theology, valuable as it is in exhibiting the reverent spirit of truth-seeking, does not reveal an entirely consistent method of procedure. It would have been remarkable if he had entirely eliminated the influence of the authority-ideal under which his youthful

thinking was shaped. Logically, however, the authority-ideal is incompatible with critical method. So long as one conceives his task to be that of an expounder of an authoritatively given system, his attitude of mind is very different from that of the critical inquirer who does not care whether his conclusions agree with those of antiquity or not so long as they are true. Dr. Clarke yielded now to one ideal, now to the other. In both cases he was absolutely sincere, and his theology was free from any suspicion of artificial compulsion. His spirit was genuinely scientific, but the tools with which he had learned to work were largely shaped by the dogmatic and homiletic procedure of the past generation. In other words, inspiring as are his expositions of theology, he does not furnish the critical reader with any definite method by which to work out conclusions for himself. He is a great prophet, summoning men to the lofty vision of a theology which shall need no external proofs; but he has left to others the task of building the highway of accurate method over which multitudes may travel. It will require courage and faith if his disciples and followers are to do their part as well as he did his.